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HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

ANNCR:

THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE HAVE JUST CONCLUDED A LONG DEBATE ON THE ISSUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS. VOA NEWS ANALYST FRED GALVAN HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE:

IT WAS THE MOST INTENSIVE DEBATE IN THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES IN RECENT YEARS. AND IT ENDED ON A POSITIVE NOTE. IT PRODUCED A CONSENSUS ON STRENGTHENING THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION -- A MOVE STRONGLY ADVOCATED BY VENEZUELA, COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA AND THE UNITED STATES AMONG OTHERS. THEY SUCCESSFULLY PUSHED THROUGH A RESOLUTION OVER OBJECTIONS RAISED BY SOME O.A.S. DELEGATIONS -- PARTICULARLY BRAZIL AND CHILE -- WHICH WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO TIGHTEN CONTROLS OVER THE COMMISSION'S JOB OF INVESTIGATING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

THERE WERE OTHER POSITIVE RESULTS FLOWING FROM THE O.A.S. HUMAN RIGHTS DEBATE. ANOTHER RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE ASSEMBLY AUTHORIZES THE COMMISSION TO CONTINUE ITS INVESTIGATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CHILE. IN ONE OF TWO REPORTS SUBMITTED TO THE ASSEMBLY, THE COMMISSION CHARGED THAT VIOLATIONS OF THOSE RIGHTS CONTINUE IN CHILE UNDER ITS MILITARY GOVERNMENT. DURING THE DEBATE, THE COMMISSION'S CHAIRMAN NOTED THAT WHILE CHILE'S MILITARY JUNTA HAS COOPERATED TO SOME EXTENT WITH ITS INQUIRY, IT HAS NOT DONE SO IN SOME ASPECTS.

CHILE'S DELEGATE SAID THE COMMISSION'S INVESTIGATION WAS NOT OBJECTIVE AND WAS LARGELY BASED ON HEARSAY. HOWEVER, FOR THE FIRST TIME BEFORE ANY INTERNATIONAL FORUM, CHILE ADMITTED THAT THE MILITARY JUNTA HAD TRIED AND CONVICTED FORTY-ONE PERSONS CHARGED WITH TORTURING POLITICAL PRISONERS. AND HE SAID ANOTHER ONE HUNDRED TWENTY ARE UNDER INVESTIGATION BY CHILEAN AUTHORITIES. THE COMMISSION CHAIRMAN SAID THE CHILEAN ANNOUNCEMENT WAS ENCOURAGING -- THAT IT INDICATED CHILE IS TRYING TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION.

THE O.A.S. DEBATE SEEMS TO HAVE HAD POSITIVE REPERCUSSIONS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY CHARGED IN A COMMISSION REPORT WITH VIOLATING HUMAN RIGHTS -- URUGUAY. ITS AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS -- FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS -- PROMISED TO FORWARD TO MONTEVIDEO A PETITION PRESENTED BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. THE PETITION ASKS THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW AN INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL BODY TO LOOK INTO ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE BY ITS MILITARY-BACKED AUTHORITIES. THE PETITION IS SIGNED BY SOME THREE HUNDRED FIFTY THOUSAND PERSONS FROM SEVENTY COUNTRIES.

AND HERE IN WASHINGTON, A SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OPENED HEARINGS TODAY (THURSDAY) ON CHARGES OF TORTURE IN URUGUAY AND OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES.

SO THE DEBATE IN THE O.A.S. ASSEMBLY OBVIOUSLY HAS HAD AN IMPACT FAR BEYOND THE CITY LIMITS OF SANTIAGO. WHAT HAS RESULTED FROM THAT DEBATE ADMITTEDLY IS A SERIES OF SMALL BUT POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD IMPROVING THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD. MUCH STILL REMAINS TO BE DONE. HOWEVER, THE INITIATIVES ADOPTED IN SANTIAGO AND THE MOVES IN THE CONGRESS AND BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SUGGEST THE WORLDWIDE IMPLICATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL REVULSION AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.
GH/RCS